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Synodality and Participatory Bodies

103. The Baptised participate in decision-making, accountability and evaluation processes through institutional structures, primarily through those already provided for the local Church set out in the existing Code of Canon Law. In the Latin Church these are: Diocesan Synod (cf. CIC, can. 466), Presbyteral Council (cf. CIC, can. 500, § 2), Diocesan Pastoral Council (cf. CIC, can. 514, § 1), Parish Pastoral Council (cf. CIC, can. 536), Diocesan and Parish Finance Council (cf. CIC, cann. 493 e 537). In the Eastern Catholic Churches these are: Eparchial Assembly (cf. CCEO, cann. 235 ss.), Eparchial Finance Council (cf. CCEO, cann. 262 ss.), Presbyteral Council (cf. CCEO can. 264), Eparchial Pastoral Council (cf. CCEO cann. 272 ss.), Parish Councils (cf. CCEO can. 295). Members participate on the basis of their ecclesial role and their differentiated responsibilities and capacities (charisms, ministries, experiences, competencies, etc). Each of these bodies plays a role in the discernment needed for the inculturated proclamation of the Gospel, for the community’s mission in its milieu, and for the witness of the Baptised. They also contribute to the decision-making processes through established means. These bodies themselves become the subject of accountability and evaluation, as they will need to give an account of their work. Participatory bodies represent 36 one of the most promising areas in which to act for rapid implementation of the synodal guidelines, bringing about perceptible changes speedily.

104. A synodal Church is based upon the existence, efficiency and effective vitality of these participatory bodies, not on the merely nominal existence of them. This requires that they function in accordance with canonical provisions or legitimate customs and with respect to the statutes and regulations that govern them. For this reason, we insist that they be made mandatory, as was requested at all stages of the

synodal process, and that they can fully play their role, and not just in a purely formal way in a manner appropriate to their diverse local contexts.

105. Furthermore, the structure and operations of these bodies need to be addressed. It is necessary to start by adopting a synodal working method. Conversation in the Spirit, after appropriate adaptation, may constitute a reference point. Particular attention should be given to the way members are selected. When no election is envisaged, a synodal consultation should be carried out that expresses as much as possible the reality of the community or the local Church, and the relevant authority should proceed to the appointment on the basis of its results, respecting the relation between consultation and deliberation described above. It is also necessary to ensure that members of diocesan and parish pastoral councils are able to propose agenda items in an analogous way to that allowed for in the presbyteral council.

106. Equal attention needs to be given to the membership of the participatory bodies so as to encourage greater involvement by women, young people, and those living in poverty or on the margins. Furthermore, it is essential that these bodies include Baptised who are committed to living their faith in the ordinary realities of life, who are recognisably committed to an apostolic and missionary life, not only those engaged with organising ecclesial life and services internally. In this way, the ecclesial discernment will benefit from a greater openness, an ability to analyse reality and a plurality of perspectives. It may be appropriate to provide for the participation of delegates from other Churches and Christian Communions, as happened during this Synodal Assembly, or representatives of the religions present in a territory. Local Churches and their groupings can more appropriately indicate criteria for the composition of participatory bodies suitable to each context.

107. The Assembly paid special attention to best practices and positive experiences of reform. These include creating networks of pastoral councils within communities, parishes, pastoral areas, and among diocesan pastoral councils. The regular hosting of ecclesial assemblies at all levels is also encouraged. Without limiting consultation to members of the Catholic Church, these gatherings should be open to listening to the contributions from other Churches and Christian Communions. Attention should also be paid to other religions in the territory.